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## THE AIR FORCE CHAPLAIN: CLERGY OR OFFICER?

by

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*Abstract*

The Air Force chaplain serves a dual role in the military. The chaplain is both clergy and officer. As clergy and officer, the chaplain must meet the qualifications of both church and military. However, after meeting the requirements of the military, the chaplain is selected for active duty by the endorsing body of his or her church. This process of meeting requirements of both church and military plus the endorsing process create a “dual allegiance” for the chaplain. The dual allegiance is born out in the military as the chaplain serves in both the capacity of clergyperson and officer. It is necessary for commanders and chaplains alike to understand potential areas of conflict if this allegiance is challenged by either the military institution or the church.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Wing Commander of Base X calls his Senior Chaplain and wants to know why retired General Smith's daughter was refused permission to get married in the Base Chapel. The chaplain explains that General Smith's daughter does not qualify under present chapel guidelines. However, because the base chapel belongs to the Wing Commander, he waves the guideline and General Smith's daughter can now use the chapel. However, another problem exists—General Smith's daughter and future husband do not meet the requirements of the base chaplains as required by the churches they represent in the military. Can the Wing Commander direct a base chaplain at that point to officiate at the wedding? This question raises an interesting dilemma—are chaplains clergy first or officers first?

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss this very issue: Are chaplains first clergy or officers? The answer can be given now and it is chaplains are both clergy and officers first. This position is not taken so as to “ride the middle of the fence” but because it is true. Chaplains are responsible *at all times to be the best chaplain as well as the best officer he or she can be.* Chaplains are both clergy and officer but this is distinguishable from

lawyers or doctors in the military and the difference will be discussed later. This leads to the focal point of the discussion: Air Force Chaplains serve a dual role in the military different from any other officer and this duality must be clearly understood within the military institution in order for the chaplain to function properly. It must be pointed out that this understanding extends to all officers—commanders and chaplains alike! Hence, this paper is directed to line officers and chaplains.

## **Plan**

The discussion will begin, first, with information about the foundation of the chaplaincy touching on the Old Testament basis of the priest being with the armies, the development of the chaplaincy, and the Constitutional basis for the chaplaincy. This discussion will also include information about the qualifications of the chaplain as an officer and clergyperson as well as an overview of ecclesiastical endorsing bodies. This area will highlight the dual role of the chaplain. The second area for consideration will be the place of oaths and covenants taken by all chaplains. What do chaplains swear or affirm to do and do these oaths create a dilemma for clergy responsibilities? The oaths and covenants section focuses on the *Oath of Office, Code of Conduct for the Armed Forces of the United States*, and *The Covenant and the Code of Ethics* (issued by the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces) and how each applies to the chaplain as clergy and officer. The third subject for discussion moves to the relationship of the chaplain and the commander and potential areas of conflict. The heart of this discussion centers around how chaplains relate to commanders daily both as clergy and officer

maximizing each role. Finally, concluding thoughts will be offered. The first area of concern is the foundation of the chaplaincy.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Foundation of the Chaplaincy**

#### **Old Testament**

The involvement of the clergy in the military is traceable back to Old Testament days.

Some 3500 years ago, Moses wrote the following in Deuteronomy 20:1-4:

When you go to war your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, *the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: "Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be faint-hearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."*<sup>1</sup>

Moses recognized the importance of the impact of spiritual leaders on the morale of the armies. This begins a litany of kings and their prophets: King David had his Nathan, King Ahab had his Elijah, and King Josiah had his Jeremiah. And these ties are not restricted to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Japanese kamikaze pilots took oaths to their Emperor God and witch doctors drugged their warriors entering battle. Soldiers are humans, not animals or machines. History shows that men and women need their faith, especially when they face the possibility of dying. There is an enduring quality to the chaplaincy. While societies change, the need for spiritual guidance within society and especially in the military remains constant. The idea of chaplains serving in a military context begins here.

## **Development**

The word “chaplain” comes from a fourth-century fable involving a soldier, Martin of Tours. The story goes that Martin encountered a beggar and shared his cloak by cutting it in half. Later, in a dream, Martin believed he saw Jesus Christ wearing the cloak. Martin was so moved by this, he left the military and became a Christian. Many years after his death, Martin was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church and St. Martin of Tours became the patron saint of medieval French kings. Rulers carried into battle a part of the cloak as a reminder of the presence of God. A custodial priest or *capellanus* carried the sacred cloak as well as attended to the religious needs of the king. *Capellanus* soon became *chapellain* in Old French and “chaplain” in English. The resting place for the *capella* as well as the place for religious services became known as a “chapel.” So, chaplains originated in biblical times and have been serving in Western armies since the fourth century.<sup>2</sup>

While biblical priests were busy with their religious duties, some participated as active combatants. The noncombatant status of the clergy goes back as early as the Council of Ratisbon in 742 which prohibited “the servant of God in every way from bearing arms or fighting in the army or going against the enemy.”<sup>3</sup> This prohibition, however, did not stop many priest-soldiers from fighting next to their parishioners. Many chaplains fought alongside their parishioners in colonial America, the War of Independence, and the Civil War. Confederate General Leonidas Polk, an Episcopal Bishop, traded his robes for a saber. As the separation with England became inevitable, some colonial clergy led their congregations into battle. It would be many generations before chaplains would realize their function was ministering to body and soul rather than destroying them. It would be

nearly two centuries before chaplains embraced their primary role as agents ensuring free exercise of religion for all military members.<sup>4</sup>

The role of the chaplain in these formative years extended beyond civilian ministers simply serving the military. Israel Drazin and Cecil Currey writing in *For God and Country* says:

George Washington firmly supported the work of chaplains and for nearly two years tried, without success, to secure one for the troops under his command in Virginia's backcountry. On 23 September 1756, he wrote Governor Dinwiddie, describing the drunken and demoralized troops he commanded. "The want of a chaplain does, I humbly conceive, reflect dishonor upon the regiment," he complained. Despite an offer by his officers to pay a chaplain's salary out of their own pockets, "I think it would have a more graceful appearance were he appointed (an officer) as others are," he concluded.<sup>5</sup>

Chaplains continued to serve in the Revolutionary War and "both Congress and the military commander-in-chief regularly provided for chaplains and the religious concerns of military units throughout the War of Independence."<sup>6</sup> The *Journal of the Continental Congress* shows that on 29 July 1775, Congress provided for chaplains to minister to the troops. A salary of \$20 was set for these officers. This would make the chaplaincy the second oldest branch of the Army behind the infantry.<sup>7</sup> As the colonial army prepared to enter Canada (primarily Roman Catholic) in September 1775, George Washington wrote of his beliefs concerning the need for respect for the religion of others when he said:

As the Contempt of the Religion of a Country by ridiculing any of its Ceremonies or affronting its Ministers or Votaries from has ever been deeply resented, you are to be particularly careful to restrain every Officer and Soldier from such Imprudence and Folly and to punish every Instance of it. *As far as lays in your power, you are to protect and support the free Exercise of the Religion of the Country and the undisturbed Enjoyment of the rights of Conscience in religious Matters, with your utmost Influence and Authority.* <sup>8</sup>

This concept of the free exercise of religion and how it applies to chaplains forms the basis for the Constitutionality of the Chaplaincy.

## **Constitutional Basis**

As previously discussed, chaplains have historically served with distinction in the military since the days of George Washington. The place of chaplains in the military has been contested throughout this history. The intention of this paper is not to offer an expanded discussion of this Constitutional battle. However, it is important to show the outcome of these court battles because it speaks to the dual roles of chaplains as clergy and officer in the military environment. The legal battles have centered around the issue of *separation of Church and State*. The proponents of an illegal chaplaincy believe that based on the first amendment, the State is supporting the establishment of a religion within the military. The First Amendment says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”<sup>9</sup> What this clause “establishment of religion” implies is that no church, denomination, or belief system can be singled out for preferential treatment. Simply put, proponents of this view believe that the employment of chaplains by the government is “establishing religion.”<sup>10</sup>

Defenders of the chaplaincy argue that without the chaplaincy, soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines would be denied their guaranteed right of free exercise of religion. Since military men and women are regularly sent to the field, these troops would not be able to worship without chaplains in their midst.<sup>11</sup> Another part of the argument for the chaplaincy hinges on the fact that the First Amendment did not mean that the new government was to be antireligious or a religious. Drazin and Currey put it this way:

The exact limits of governmental involvement with religion remain an issue even today in the courts. Government respect for religion at the time of the nation's birth, however, can be seen in many ways, one example of which is that from the very first day of the first session of the First Congress in 1789, every session of Congress has been opened with prayer. Sitting in the First Congress were many of the men who had framed the Constitution, including James Madison, author of the First Amendment.<sup>12</sup>

As recently as 1979, a suit challenging the legality of the Army Chaplaincy was filed by two Harvard law students. The outcome was that the courts ruled in favor of the army's argument and belief that chaplains are not present so much to establish religion as to insure the free exercise of religion.<sup>13</sup>

A good question to ask at this point is why is this important? The answer is chaplains serve in the military to ensure the free exercise of religion for all of the military community. Chaplains work directly for Commanders. In this capacity, they are both clergy and officer. Are they first minister, priest, rabbi or are they first officers? A discussion of the origin of dual role of chaplains will help to answer this question.

## **Officer Qualifications**

In order for a minister, priest, or rabbi to serve in the military, he or she must meet both governmental and church requirements. The military requirements pertaining to physical condition, age, educational level, and security clearance must all be satisfied before a chaplain is commissioned. Department of Defense Directive 1304.19 requires a candidate to have a Masters of Divinity or equivalent degree or a minimum of three years of graduate-level study in theology or related subjects.<sup>14</sup> Why does the government require this educational background? Simply put, the government recognizes the unique environment of the military and thus expects chaplains to be skilled and competent

professionals. Besides this, the role of the chaplain is expanded in the military beyond meeting the religious needs of a single faith group. Drazin and Currey say “The Defense Department has adjudged that chaplains with such an education will not only be fully qualified as clergy but will also possess the requisite broad skills enabling them to perform effectively and professionally as staff members and administrators in a complex and sophisticated military organization.”<sup>15</sup> The uniqueness of the military environment requires that chaplains be sensitive to the needs and viewpoints of all military members. This leads to the church qualifications chaplains must possess.

### **Church Qualifications**

The other qualifying agent of this dual role is the Church. Chaplains do not serve in the military simply because they qualify under Department of Defense guidelines and choose to do so. Churches set their own qualifications for their representatives. While they may differ somewhat from church to church, some basics are inherent to all churches. First, chaplains are required to earn an undergraduate degree, either a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science from an accredited college or university. Second, each candidate must have completed at least ninety hours of course work at an accredited seminary. Third, each candidate must meet all the requirements of the armed forces. Fourth, chaplains must go through a demanding screening process by a certified agency of their own faith group which leads to endorsement. Fifth, each candidate must serve at least two years at the local church level or equivalent in order to gain valuable pastoral experience. The two years of minimum service is a standard condition of endorsement in most denominations.<sup>16</sup> A discussion of ecclesiastical agencies or endorsing bodies is necessary at this point.

## **Endorsing Bodies**

The military recruits its chaplains through Endorsing Agents. There are some forty-seven separate ecclesiastical endorsing agents representing 179 denominations. Any religious group may petition to become an endorsing agent. Approval or disapproval is predicated on criteria set by the Department of Defense, including Department of Defense Directive 1304.19. DOD 1304.19 states, “Religious faith groups seeking DOD recognition as ecclesiastical endorsing organizations for supplying chaplains to the Military Services shall apply to the Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB).”<sup>17</sup> The process of endorsing chaplains began during World War I and serves to verify that a minister, priest or rabbi is certified as clergy. This responsibility falls to the endorsing agents and not the military in determining the religious qualifications of the candidate. The endorsing process certifies that chaplains are authentic ministers and not proponents of civil, established, or military religion.<sup>18</sup> The idea of ecclesiastical endorsement can easily be misunderstood even by chaplains. Many chaplains and lay people alike believe endorsement means the chaplain represents his or her individual church organization in the military. This is not so. To represent only his or her church, synagogue, or parish would violate the First Amendment issue of “establishing a religion.” In truth, the endorsement process simply certifies that chaplains are recognized by their church and authorized to serve in the military. The First Amendment of the Constitution does not allow the military to do this and so the responsibility falls to the Endorsing bodies.

Unlike other professions where officers desiring to become doctors or lawyers who, if qualified, can be sent at government expense to medical school or law school and then serve out their commitment in the military, chaplains must be qualified before entering the

service. The military, once they invest in the education of a lawyer or doctor, then expects the doctor or lawyer to fulfill his or her commitment. However, because chaplains come on active duty by virtue of both officer qualifications *and endorsement*, the military cannot send candidates to seminary and then *expect their commitment*. Chaplains are brought onto active duty by the military, but *they are selected for active duty by endorsing bodies!*

Once a candidate meets the qualifications of the Department of Defense and his or her church endorsing body, he or she is then brought on active duty. The new chaplain must now learn to balance clergy responsibilities and officer responsibilities. Already stated is the fact that chaplains cannot advocate “their church” organization within the military or they will be in violation of the First Amendment. However, while chaplains are expected to oversee the free exercise of religion, they still must adhere to their church beliefs and practices. Hadley and Richards put it best when they say:

Newly commissioned military chaplains must learn to comfortably wear a uniform that sets them apart as both *military officer* (symbolized by his or her rank) and *endorsed representatives of a particular faith group* (symbolized by the chaplain’s cross or tablets). Should chaplains ever lose their denominational endorsement, those chaplains could possibly forfeit their commission. Nor need wearing this uniform ever cause chaplains to compromise personal convictions. Chaplains are never required to participate in an activity that violates the tenets of their faith. A person who believes in one mode of baptism, for example, cannot be required to administer baptism by another mode.<sup>19</sup>

The important point is that while chaplains *cannot promote their own churches and proselytize in the military*, at the same time they cannot do anything in violation of their church beliefs or practices, otherwise their endorsement can be withdrawn. *And chaplains cannot serve in the military without an endorsement!*

So, chaplains represent churches which expect them to minister to all people but always in keeping with church beliefs and practices. At the same time, chaplains are officers working for commanders who expect them to serve the institution whatever the need. This is the point where potential conflict can and will occur if a clear understanding of the role of the chaplain is not understood—by commanders and chaplains alike! A viable working relationship and constant open communication between chaplain and commander can help in preventing this conflict. A discussion of the various oaths and covenants guiding the chaplain and officer is the next focus.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Oaths and Covenants**

#### **Oath of Office**

Given that all qualifications are met and a chaplain is brought on active duty, he or she takes an oath of office. All military members are required to take this oath. The oath says:

I (full name), having been appointed a (second lieutenant) in the United States Air Force, do solemnly (swear or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter, so help me God.<sup>20</sup>

At first glance there would appear to be no conflict for the chaplain as either clergy or officer in taking the oath of office. From an officer perspective, all officers are expected to take this oath and follow it even to the point of giving one's life in defense of their country. However, a closer look at the oath raises a couple of areas that must be considered for the clergy. First, the oath says officers are "to support and defend" the Constitution. Any chaplain worth his or her salt will work daily to be the best officer he or she can. The struggle for many clergy is the first "calling" is to serve God and that is done in the context of serving the Constitution. This is not to say the Constitution is not important. For the Christian chaplain, Jesus made it very plain when he said, "Then he said to them, 'Give to

Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.”<sup>21</sup> Our citizenship in the United States and service in the military requires that we follow certain dictates set by our government. As a Christian, however, our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven requires that we pledge to our Lord our primary obedience and commitment. I believe there are occasions when this allegiance is called into question for the chaplain. Those will be discussed later in the chaplain's relationship to the commander. For now, suffice it to say this allegiance for the chaplain is to God and country. But the chaplain also has allegiance to his church. While chaplains do not take an oath from their respective churches before entering active duty, as already mentioned, if a chaplain ventures beyond acceptable church practices, he or she can have the existing endorsement removed. If this occurs, he or she must leave active duty. The point needs to be reiterated that “supporting and defending” the Constitution does not automatically put chaplains in conflict with church and state. As a matter of fact, this will rarely be the case. The point is to raise the issue again that chaplains serve a dual purpose in the military by representing not only the military but also their church.

The second area for discussion in the oath is, “against all enemies.” Colonel Orwyn Sampson writing in *Concepts for Air Force Leadership* says concerning “against all enemies”:

There is inherent risk involved in my work. It is a call to arms and a call to sacrifice. The stakes are high. It is life we are supporting and defending and it is life that it may cost—whether supremely or on a moment-by-moment routine basis.<sup>22</sup>

One thing this implies is that all officers are combatants for the words “it is a call to arms” is used. The issue is that chaplains are non-combatants and in that respect are prohibited

from “taking up arms.” It is not a matter of whether a chaplain is “one of us” as an officer or not; it is, however, by virtue of status that a chaplain cannot take up arms. Air Force Instruction 52-101, 1.5, Chaplain Service Duty Restrictions states: “Chaplains do not perform duties incompatible with your professional role and *noncombatant status*.<sup>23</sup> And this is the oath that all commissioned officers take to serve in the military. Chaplains do not take a separate or different oath nor should they. This inclusion of the oath of office is simply to show that officership in the military when it comes to a chaplain is not a blanket thing. This is not meant to imply chaplains are to be treated with “special favor.” It is to say that there is a duality of purpose that follows a chaplain in all he or she does. This is even evident in the title given to a chaplain. AFI 52-101, 1.3 states: “Use title and rank (Chaplain, rank) in official correspondence. Address chaplains as ‘chaplain’ regardless of grade.”<sup>24</sup>

## **Code of Conduct**

The Code of Conduct for the Armed Forces of the United States is a code that all servicemembers should know. It applies to conduct in time of war for those who are captured. The six articles make up the fighting man’s code of conduct. Each article is considered based on how it applies to the chaplain as clergy and as officer.

**Article I:** “I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.”<sup>25</sup> Simply put, chaplains are not fighting members of the military. Recall the statement made earlier from AFI 52-101 that chaplains do not perform duties which take them out of the noncombatant role. Chaplains are to be with the fighting troops but are forbidden to take up a combatant

role. Most chaplains would proudly give their lives serving with the troops defending our nation. And these chaplains would be in that environment making sure the spiritual needs of the men and women are met.

**Article II:** “I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command I will never surrender my men while they still have the means to resist.”<sup>26</sup> The applicability of this article to the discussion centers around the phrase “if in command.” By regulation, chaplains have rank without command. Even if the chaplain is the ranking person, he or she is prohibited from commanding. This is true in peacetime as well. If disciplinary action needs to be taken against a subordinate chaplain or Chaplain Service Support Personnel, that action must be taken by the Squadron Commander of the Mission Support Squadron and not by the supervising or senior chaplain.

**Article III:** “If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.”<sup>27</sup> The responsibility of the chaplain in this case is not to try and escape but to stay to provide care to those who are prisoners of war. The Geneva Convention uses the term “Retained Chaplain” to describe the status of the chaplain and says:

Chaplains who fall into the hands of the enemy Power and who remain or are retained with a view to assisting prisoners of war, shall be allowed to minister to them and to exercise freely their ministry amongst prisoners of war of the same religion, in accordance with their religious conscience. They shall be allocated among the camps and labor detachments containing prisoners of war belonging to the same forces, speaking the same language or practicing the same religion. They shall enjoy the necessary facilities, including the means of transport provided for in Article 33, for visiting the prisoners of war outside the camp. They shall be free to correspond, subject to censorship, on matters concerning their religious duties with the ecclesiastical authorities in the country of detention and with the international religious organizations.<sup>28</sup>

**Article IV:** “If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with all my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any actions which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.”<sup>29</sup> Because of their noncombatant status, the Geneva Convention does not allow chaplains to be taken as prisoners of war. However, the enemy might not abide by these dictates. As previously mentioned, however, chaplains still cannot assume command. It does not mean that chaplains will not be beneficial to the senior person. And chaplains could be most beneficial in their capacity as clergy in this scenario.

**Article V:** “When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am *required* to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.”<sup>30</sup> The officer responsibilities for the chaplain are clear and self-evident here.

**Article VI:** “I will never forget that I am an American fighting man, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.”<sup>31</sup> Again, the key application here is not the officer responsibility that apply to the fighting man but the clergy responsibilities that apply to the chaplain. If the chaplain is ever to be the bastion of hope, this is the time. And this is possible in the capacity of clergy. A good example of this occurred in World War II in the Philippines. Chaplain Robert Taylor was a part of the American military which surrendered and thus he became a member of the “Death March” which led from Bataan through the streets of Manila, to a prison camp, where he ministered to more than 10,000

patients, and spent fourteen weeks in solitary confinement for smuggling in medical supplies for his men. The aforementioned are the oaths and codes administered by the military. The next section deals with church covenants and expectations as applied to the chaplain.

### **The Covenant and the Code of Ethics**

The Military Code of Conduct speaks to those finding themselves as prisoners of war. While applicable to the fighting man, it has limited applicability to the chaplain as an officer. There is a document which not only has applicability to the chaplain as clergy but is applicable on a day-to-day basis. This document is The Covenant and The Code of Ethics for Chaplains of the Armed Forces. This covenant and code is the result of a project by The National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces. This new document (January 1995) will not require chaplains to raise their right hand or place it on the Bible (or other appropriate book) and swear or affirm to its allegiance. However, it will be distributed to all chaplains serving in the military with the intent of asking them to commit to it. The document will be distributed to all chaplains through their respective endorsing bodies with the purpose of providing a covenant to which all chaplains will ascribe. Several statements are relevant to the discussion of the dual role of the chaplain and the expectation of endorsing bodies.

The opening statement in the Code says "*I will hold in trust the traditions and practices of my religious body.*"<sup>32</sup> Most endorsing bodies have former military chaplains serving with them. These chaplains understand the responsibilities of the officer part of the chaplaincy. However, they also understand the responsibilities chaplains have for their

endorsing agents. This statement expresses part of the expectation churches hold before their representatives. No church would ask their chaplains to do less than their best as officers but at the same time, it is clear that church loyalties must be kept too. This is seen further in the statement “*I will carefully adhere to whatever direction may be conveyed to me by my endorsing body for maintenance of my endorsement.*”<sup>33</sup> One of the areas of impact by this statement is in the area of divorce. The military is not overly concerned by the divorce of an officer even if it is a chaplain. However, churches differ in their interpretations of divorce and how it is or is not applicable to the qualifications of the chaplain as a minister. While the military would not consider divorce, in and of itself, a disqualifier for service as an officer, some churches might remove a chaplain’s endorsement because of divorce.

Another area for observation is the statement “I will, if in a supervisory position, respect the practices and beliefs of each chaplain I supervise, and exercise care not to require of them any service or practice that would be in violation of the faith practices of their particular religious body.”<sup>34</sup> Think back to the opening scenario of the paper. The senior chaplain works for the wing commander and is also responsible to his chaplains. Following this Code, the senior chaplain would try and protect all of his or her chaplains from having to perform a wedding or any ceremony or service not in keeping with the practices of that chaplain’s church or endorsing body. The last part of the Code for consideration is the statement “I will hold in confidence any privileged communication received by me during the conduct of my ministry. I will not disclose confidential communications in private or in public.”<sup>35</sup> This again speaks to the issue of confidentiality at all times and especially those precarious times when the commander (or perhaps even

some chaplains) might believe the good of the institution out-weighs the confidentiality of the military member. The dual position of the chaplain as clergy and as officer is again difficult at times to weigh. While this struggle might not occur on an intellectual level, it certainly occurs at the practical level. And the responsibilities of the chaplain are weighed by commitments to personal and church beliefs and expectations over against commitments to the oath of office and “good officership.” This leads to a discussion of area of potential conflict between chaplains and commanders.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Life Application Bible*, New International Version (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1991), 308.

<sup>2</sup> Israel Drazin and Cecil B. Currey, *For God and Country: The History of a Constitutional Challenge to the Army Chaplaincy*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1995), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>9</sup> Donald W. Hadley and Gerald T. Richards, *Ministry with the Military* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1992), 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>12</sup> Drazin and Currey, *For God and Country*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Hadley and Richards, *Ministry with the Military*, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense Directive 1304.19, *Appointment of Chaplains for the Military Services*, 18 September 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Israel Drazin and Cecil Currey, *For God and Country*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Defense Directive 1304.19, *Appointment of Chaplains for the Military Services*, 18 September 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Drazin and Currey, *For God and Country*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Hadley and Richards, *Ministry with the Military*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> *Concepts for Air Force Leadership*, AU-24, prepared by Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education (Maxwell AFB, AL.: Air University, 1990), 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> *Life Application Bible*, 1699.

<sup>22</sup> *Concepts for Air Force Leadership*, 11.

## Notes

<sup>23</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 52-101, *Chaplain Service Responsibilities and Procedures*, 28 January 1994, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Concepts for Air Force Leadership*, 64.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>28</sup> Geneva Convention, *Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Article 35, 1960, 229.

<sup>29</sup> *Concepts for Air Force Leadership*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>32</sup> *The Covenant and The Code of Ethics for Chaplains of the Armed Forces*, The National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces, 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Areas of Potential Conflict**

#### **Relationship of the Chaplain to the Commander**

Up to this point, one might believe that what is presented concerning the possible conflict of the dual role of the chaplain is really “gray area” material. It is now time to turn to specific areas of application. In discussing the relationship of the chaplain to the commander, one sees various day-to-day situations which calls the issue to the forefront. The issue is, given the dual role of chaplains, are they first clergy or officers? A comprehensive look at this relationship and several situations speaks to the issue.

The key to a viable working relationship between chaplain and commander is understanding the dual role of the chaplain (by commanders and chaplains alike) and working within what chaplains can do for the commander. The real heart of the chaplaincy is at the wing level. This is the level where most chaplains work and serve daily. There are two areas within a wing or base where chaplains focus but with different emphasis. The first is the relationship of the senior chaplain (of the base) to the wing commander (and possibly the group commanders depending on the particular set-up within that wing or base) and the second, is the relationship of the squadron/unit chaplains to their respective commanders. AFPD 52-1, 1.7.3, *Chaplain Service*, states: “Commanders through the

chaplain service accommodate the religious practices of assigned personnel and family members by providing resources for a comprehensive religious program.”<sup>1</sup> Commanders are responsible for the entire base and chaplains work for the commander as the professionals in the area of “free exercise of religion.” In other words, while the wing commander “owns” the wing, his or her senior chaplain is responsible for the religious programs, spiritual guidance, and all facets of the chaplaincy that benefit the men and women of the wing.

So, the wing commander is entrusted with a responsibility that demands he or she “render unto Caesar” at all times. That is the trust. The senior chaplain (and all chaplains for that matter) is entrusted not only with rendering unto Caesar but is also expected in one form or another (depending on the faith group and beliefs) to render unto God. Do these ever conflict? And if they do conflict, is the chaplain committed to personal or church beliefs (rendering unto God) or committed to the commander? The tension sometimes occurs when the commander sees the chaplain as a “military” minister, priest, or rabbi able to meet any need or want of the military member or commander. Commanders must understand that Churches, denominations, or personal convictions determine to a large degree what weddings a chaplain can perform, which types of worship services to lead, how communion will be served and to whom, what special services one can lead, the place of women in ministry roles, and even the approach taken in counseling.

The scenario given in the introduction to this paper asked the question, whether the wing commander could direct a chaplain (working for him or her) to officiate at a wedding. The answer is yes, absolutely! A wing commander could very easily expect chaplains working for him or her to take care of the people. Should the commander order the

chaplain to perform the ceremony? No! Since chaplains are officers working within the military environment, each expects and desires to follow orders. However, from a clergy perspective, the chaplain could refuse to perform the ceremony based on personal or church policies concerning weddings. The point here is not to argue whether a commander should or should not order a chaplain to do this or whether a chaplain should or should not follow the order. Further, this is an area where problems could occur if the dual nature of the chaplain's role is not clearly understood by commander and chaplain alike. Part of the tension for the chaplain comes from the fact that, on the one hand, if he or she fails to follow the order (a good officer wants to follow orders), then he or she is subject to possible disciplinary action. On the other hand, the endorsement of the chaplain could be removed if he or she goes against church practices. Drazin and Currey address the dilemma this way:

From a factual, practical, and non-legal viewpoint, chaplains do not represent their denomination and receive orders, not from their church or synagogue, but from their commanders. If commanders order chaplains to do something that violates their religious convictions, they have the same free exercise faced by other soldiers. They have no special protection under law simply because they are chaplains. At best, they receive special consideration from commanders because they are fellow officers.<sup>2</sup>

Open communications between the commander and the chaplain will help prevent possible conflict in situations like this.

Another area of possible conflict is in giving invocations or delivering prayers at base events. The point to consider here is how the prayer is concluded. Chaplains pray at all kinds of events for all kinds of occasions with all kinds of audiences. Invariably, the audience is filled with people from various backgrounds and perhaps different religious convictions, very pluralistic in make-up. How a chaplain chooses to end the prayer may be

controversial. You may ask how can the ending to a prayer be controversial? The controversy comes from a Christian chaplain ending the prayer with the words “in Jesus’ name” or “in the name of Jesus.” Some people are offended by these words because, perhaps, they believe differently. The objection to ending a prayer in this manner oftentimes is predicated on the fact that the prayer is a “public” prayer and the chaplain should be sensitive to the variety of beliefs present at the event. Sensitivity to the beliefs of others is one of the main reasons some chaplains are chosen over others to serve in the diverse arena of the military. Christian chaplains follow the teaching of the Bible which says that when we pray, we pray in the name of Jesus. Some chaplains opt to end their prayers by saying “in your holy name” or simply “amen.” The point is that the military seeks to be sensitive to the differences of all people serving and adheres to clear policies of no discrimination based on sex, race, education, creed, et cetera. The wing commander is responsible for enforcing these policies and seeks to do so. If someone complains to the wing commander about a particular chaplain’s prayer and the commander raises the issue to the chaplain, what does the chaplain do? Does the chaplain serve his commander or does the chaplain stand on his or her beliefs. Please recognize that the chaplain desires to be both a good chaplain and a good officer. The commander desires to enforce existing policies. Again, the issue here is not to discuss prayer endings but rather to point to an area where the chaplain’s role might be conflictual. Chaplains who will pray “in Jesus’s name” may choose to tell the commander before hand. And the understanding of the chaplain and the commander to this will have everything to do with whether or not it is an issue.

A third situation concerns what is known as *privileged communication*. Simply stated, privileged communication is the protection of confidential information. The Uniform

Code of Military Justice, Manual for Courts-Martial states in Rule 503, *General Rule of Privilege*: “A communication is ‘confidential’ if made to a clergyman in the clergyman’s capacity as a spiritual adviser or to a clergyman’s assistant in the assistant’s official capacity and is not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is in furtherance of the purpose of the communication or to those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.”<sup>3</sup> People expect (and rightly so) that information shared in confidence with a clergy person is protected from dissemination. This is a protection granted to a person when talking to a chaplain. Few commanders would expect a chaplain to break this confidence. What happens if a young airman under the Nuclear Surety Personnel Reliability Program (program which ensures that the most reliable people handle, control, and secure nuclear weapons to include security police, maintenance personnel, missileers, and rated crewmembers) comes to the chaplain with a problem that makes the individual a possible risk? Or, what happens if someone working for the chaplain shares confidential information? Regardless of the severity of the impact of that information, what would a commander expect a chaplain to do? The officer role might demand that that information be shared with the commander in deference to the needs of the institution. However, the clergy role of the chaplain dictates that *under no circumstances is the requirement to keep the information privileged waived!* While this situation might seem remote, there are some commanders who believe that the good of the institution is always put first. If that is true and in turn applied accordingly, then the issue of whether a chaplain is clergy or officer first will be called into question.

The key to a viable working relationship between chaplain and commander is a reciprocal understanding of the dual role of the chaplain and working within what

chaplains can do for the commander. Commanders should expect chaplains to set the spiritual, moral, and ethical climate for the entire wing or base. This does not mean chaplains or their staff are *better than anyone* this simply means that chaplains are to continually be, in every way, “*reminders of the Holy.*” Chaplains should be expected (in chaplain jargon) to “serve in the midst” of the people “carrying the message of God” to his people. And the key to that message, as most commanders know, is no matter how good the message might be, no matter how much that message might benefit the people, if the messengers are not people who maintain these highest of standards, then the message will seldom be heard and understandably so. And chaplains should expect commanders to allow them the freedom to carry the message of God to God’s people. This means, among other things, recognizing the uniqueness of the role the chaplain plays in benefiting the people of the wing. This does not mean giving or telling people what they want to hear but rather sharing with them what they need to hear, always pastorally and with love. With the ever-changing environment within the military—drawdowns, increased TDY’s, more uncertainty, the myriad of social issues, chaplains should expect commanders to allow them to be the “well of resources” to the commander and his or her people.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 52-1, *Chaplain Service*, 7 September 1993, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Drazin and Currey, *For God and Country*, 210.

<sup>3</sup> Uniform Code of Military Justice, *Manual for Courts-Martial*, United States, 1984, Rule 503.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

So, what does the chaplain do? Does he or she submit to the Oath of Office by obeying orders and supporting the mission? Or, does he or she submit to his or her ecclesiastical oaths and covenants? *The chaplain can best support the commander by doing both!*

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